

elsewhere. Failing to allow nature to take its course invites a bigger disaster as more and more water is forced into the narrow fortified walls of the Mississippi.

Think about how we have shortened and narrowed that river. We haven't reduced the amount of water; we've just reduced the areas where it can go. It makes the inevitable flooding worse. Building a levee is simply going to move it a little further downstream.

The solution is to allow the river to go where nature wants it, not encourage farmers to cultivate even more land that will be vulnerable to crop loss, more disaster relief, more crop insurance loss, and to take away increasingly scarce wildlife habitat for the millions of Americans who would like to hunt and fish. Done right, this can be a virtuous cycle. It saves tax dollars, improves the environment, reduces the damage from flooding and all the attendant costs.

It is a classic example of where the Federal Government should learn from 200 years' experience of trying to engineer the Mississippi River and instead allow, in some cases, nature to take its course and avoid more expensive and worse damage.

This is what we need to do across the Federal Government. We don't have to spend twice as much money on health care as most of the developed countries for outcomes that are mediocre at best. We don't have to spend more money on defense than 12 or 13 of the remaining largest defense budgets and on weapons that in many cases, like our nuclear arsenal where we have far more than we need and can ever use and can afford, we can pare down, save tens of billions of dollars and still be the most powerful Nation in the world; or the outrageous crop insurance that encourages reckless and expensive behavior by paying farmers to plant crops on land that never should have been cultivated in the first place.

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While we will control spending and increase revenues, the most important thing we can do is to change the way we do business, using common sense, proven technology, stretching our tax dollars, and making our communities more livable. We can start by not pressuring the Corps of Engineers to complete the levees, spending millions of dollars we don't have on a solution that will make the problem worse. Let's work, instead, to understand the impacts of global warming and extreme weather and then do something about it.

FEDERAL DEBT

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Kentucky (Mr. WHITFIELD) for 5 minutes.

Mr. WHITFIELD. Mr. Speaker, tonight, in this House Chamber, President Obama will give his State of the

Union address to a joint session of Congress.

Article II, Section 3 of the Constitution requires that the President, whoever it may be, shall, from time to time, give to Congress information on the State of the Union. George Washington, the first President, addressed the joint session of Congress, but Thomas Jefferson and each succeeding President up until 1913 presented a written statement of the State of the Union to the House and Senate. So from 1801 until 1913, Presidents submitted a written State of the Union, and on April 8, 1913, Woodrow Wilson, like George Washington, addressed a joint session of Congress, and that has been the manner of our State of the Union by every President since, with the exception of Herbert Hoover.

Today, I am asking for another little change in the State of the Union. I think that we should consider a requirement that the President, on a day that coincides with the State of the Union, also have the Federal Government make a formal declaration of national debt.

My purpose in calling for the declaration is twofold: First, while information about the debt can be found, it is spread throughout a vast array of budget submissions, trustee reports, and other documents that are nearly impossible to navigate or to understand when trying to determine the total national debt and unfunded liabilities our Nation must pay now and in the future. And then the second reason, of course, is to elevate the issue to remind the American public the significant dangers of large government debt.

As of today, our Nation's Federal debt exceeds our Nation's gross domestic product. What does that mean? Gross domestic product is used to determine the monetary value of all the finished goods and services produced in America annually, and it includes all of the private and public consumption, all of the government outlays, all the investments and all the exports, less the imports.

Our debt is increasing so quickly that it really is difficult to give an exact figure of our national debt. Suffice it to say that it will, in the very near future, exceed \$17 trillion. When I looked at the so-called "clock" on my way over here, it was approaching \$16.6 trillion. Now, if you stacked \$16 trillion one-dollar bills one on top of the other, it would extend more than 1 million miles, which would reach to the Moon and back twice.

Now, former Speaker PELOSI said a few days ago that we do not have a spending problem. Now, I do not believe that most Americans would agree with that statement. Families throughout America must live within their means or suffer the consequences, and our government must live within its means or suffer the consequences. Many people say there are no real consequences, but all of us have seen the loss of jobs, the violence, the lack of

economic growth in countries like Greece and Spain and other parts of the European Union.

President Obama took office on January 20, 2009, and the Nation's total debt on that day was \$10.6 trillion. Today, it is over \$16.5 trillion. The President has drastically increased this country's debt in a mere 4-year span; in fact, it has increased by over 45 percent. However, it should be pointed out that he and he alone is not responsible for all this dramatic increase in debt. Every person that has served in the U.S. Congress in the recent past or today, House Members and Senate Members, are also responsible for the spending that we have approved. Also, those people who serve in the executive branch of government are also responsible.

Just to give you a few examples, 9 or 10 months ago, the Department of Energy built about 12 new buildings over here on The Mall, across from the Jefferson Memorial, for a solar exhibit. It stayed there for about 10 months, and then it was torn down. No one really knows how much the debt cost.

EPA, each year, gives grants to other countries, including China, to help them with their environmental problems at a time when we have to borrow money from China to meet our obligations. And then, as Mr. JONES mentioned earlier, in Afghanistan, we're spending \$28 million a day.

So I think it would be beneficial to the American people to prepare an annual declaration of the national debt to be made available to the Congress and the public. This would show the American people how much we owed last year, how much we owe this year, and what the projected debt is for the future.

THE BLAME GAME

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Maryland (Mr. HOYER) for 5 minutes.

Mr. HOYER. Mr. Speaker, tonight, the President will once again walk into this Chamber and lay out a vision for how to strengthen America in the years ahead. Properly, part of that vision will include the need to solve our deficit challenge and address the looming sequester. That dangerous set of automatic and indiscriminate spending cuts is due to take effect in just under 3 weeks. But instead of working with Democrats to avert the sequester through a big and balanced solution—or, frankly, even a short-term balanced proposal—a growing number of House Republicans are, instead, engaged in a dangerous blame game.

Majority Leader CANTOR joined in that this weekend, claiming that the President is the one who proposed the sequester in the first place. What he didn't say was, of course, the Republicans offered a piece of legislation called. The sequester was an integral part of their policy proposal. In fact, the sequester was part of a bipartisan